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THE ENGLISH ODE TO 1660: an essay in Literary History,
by Robert Shafer. Princeton University Press, 1918.

The ode is the most difficult of all lyric types to analyze or to pursue through the course of the history of poetry. It cannot be defined with accuracy, because the term has been used by poets themselves with such varied implications; and no one knows, when the word is met with, whether it is employed primarily with reference to metrical form or more internal qualities. These difficulties have been fully perceived by Dr. Shafer, and it is greatly to his credit that he has been able to expound the history of the subject with decent attention to the ambiguity of his topic but without resulting confusion of mind. For the purposes of a dissertation one might have advised him to confine himself either to the metrical or the literary aspect of the ode; yet it is probable that, the more one knew of the subject, the more certain one would be that the two aspects are not practicably separable. Dr. Shafer makes his own attempt at definition, saying that we must require of an ode that it be "a lyrical poem, serious in tone and stately in its structure; that it be cast in the form of an address; that it be rapid in style, treating its subject with 'brevity and variety'; and that its unity be emotional in character." There is of course opportunity for question here, especially concerning the omission of any statement concerning the tendency toward flexible or varied metrical form; on the other hand it may be said that since this is only a *tendency*, it cannot be made a differentia for purposes of definition.

The historical aspect of the subject is admirably handled. Dr. Shafer first brings together the principal accepted facts concerning the ode in the classical languages; then gives an account of the use of the term in English before 1600; then considers the knowledge and imitation of Pindar in the Renaissance; and in the succeeding chapters analyzes in detail the work of odists from Drayton to Cowley. He pauses to explore, conscientiously but not pedantically, any incidental matter which appears to need clearing up, and gives evidence either of unusual judgment or of particularly sound guidance (probably both) in his use of the minor or ancillary bibliography of his subject. His literary sense and sense of humor, too commonly dispensed with in dissertations, would also seem to be keen;—but I wish that the latter had kept him from a prevailingly ponderous use of the editorial or scholastic "we."

The chief value of this monograph, apart from its fitness to satisfy the curiosity which many of us must have felt respecting the early history of the ode in the Renaissance, is in laying a basis for the understanding of the later ode—say from Dryden to Shelley, not to go further. It stops, therefore, reasonably

enough, with Cowley, whose influence did so much to determine the development of the form; though it might be wished that the story had been carried on to Congreve and the beginning of the reaction in favor of regularity. Of special significance are the matters of the source and the poetic values of Cowley's irregular rhythmic form, and it may be well to say a word in detail regarding each of these subjects. Dr. Shafer has given no little attention to the antecedents of the *vers libres* of the English Pindarists, and includes, to this end, a compendious and much-needed sketch of the earlier history of free lyric rhythms; in particular, he gives interesting evidence for the influence of Crashaw on Cowley in this respect. He further brings evidence against the statement of Mr. Gosse (which has been followed by a number of later writers, including the present reviewer) that Cowley had misunderstood the structure of the odes of Pindar.¹ On the other hand he probably exaggerates the relative importance of the earlier English experiments in irregular verse; for most of them do not bear a very close resemblance to Cowley's, and his arrangement of such verses in strophes which bear a certain superficial resemblance to Pindar's, taken together with his adaptation of them to the formal ode, suggests that he believed himself to be obtaining a rough equivalent in effect both to eye and ear.²

As to the esthetic effects of Cowley's irregular cadences, Dr. Shafer has almost nothing to say; and this is unfortunate, when one considers that they must have made a strong impression on writers of the next generation, and indirectly affected ode rhythms down to our own time. Take for example the combination a_5a_3 , or, as it might be called, the 5+3 cadence: we find it in Cowley's ode on "The Resurrection,"

Then shall the scattered atoms crowding come
Back to their ancient home,—

in Dryden's Killigrew Ode,—

Hear then a mortal Muse thy praise rehearse
In no ignoble verse,—

¹ This is primarily a question of Cowley's Greek scholarship and of the character of the editions accessible to him, matters to which Mr. Gosse might have been presumed to have given due consideration, but apparently he did not. Dr. Shafer's other reason, based on Cowley's remarks in his Preface regarding the "regular feet and measures" of his original, is, I think, quite apart from the question; that is, it has nothing to do with "the choral divisions of the Greek triad." No one has ever supposed that Cowley did not know that Pindar's "feet and measures" were quite different from his own.

² Dr. Shafer need not, therefore, have laughed (by means of an exclamation point) at Saintsbury's mention of Pindar and the Greek choruses as *among* Cowley's "patterns."

and (to make a long leap) in Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality",—

Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.

(I do not, of course, mean to imply that Cowley invented the cadence;—we have it, for example, in Spenser's "Epithalamion:")

Go to the bower of my beloved love,
My truest turtle-dove;—

but that his odes are a good place to study it with reference to its influence on later odists.) Clearly the question of the lyric values of such devices as this, and also of various rime arrangements, is one of considerable importance for the history of the subject;—a more important question, for all practical purposes, than the difference between the regular and irregular type of Pindaric, since this latter difference is scarcely perceptible by the ear. Perhaps at a later time Dr. Shafer will pursue this aspect of his theme, and carry the matter at least as far as Gray, or even to Shelley, as he could evidently do with happy results.

Finally, it may be noted that the monograph is not only better written but better printed than most dissertations. The mechanics of copy and proof have been handled in a genuinely workmanlike fashion, and the Bibliography is a model, both editorially and typographically, for unpretentious lists of its kind. I have noted for the most part only such trifling errata as are self-correcting. In the last clause on page 113 the printer seems to have made the writer to say ("in consonance with Horace's pastoral vignette") the opposite of what he means.

RAYMOND M. ALDEN.

Leland Stanford Jr. University.

PATIENCE, A WEST MIDLAND POEM OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY, edited by Hartley Bateson, B. A. Second Edition, recast and partly rewritten. Manchester, At the University Press. Longmans, Green & Co., 1918. xlviii—77.

Mr. Bateson's second edition, it may be said at once, is a considerable improvement on the first. It gives evidence that he is glad to learn and is willing to consider the suggestions of others. The book as a whole is reduced from 149 to 125 pages. From the Introduction has been excluded the *Hypothetical Sketch of the Poet*, and two short *Appendices*. New and fuller foot-notes improve it in other respects. Most of the misprints